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Fashionable Amusements Inconsistent with the Design and Spirit of the Gospel

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FASHIONABLE AMUSEMENTS INCONSISTENT WITH THE
DESIGN AND SPIRIT OF THE GOSPEL, CONTRARY
TO THE EXPRESS COMMANDS OF GOD, AND
IN MANY RESPECTS PRODUCTIVE OF
EVIL

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED

FEBRUARY 5, 1804.

BY KIAH BAYLEY, A. M.
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN NEW-CASTLE, (MAINE.)

WISCASSET :
PRINTED BY BABSON AND RUST.

1804,

INTRODUCTION.

THE Author had no expectation, when this discourse was delivered, that it would ever be printed ; but as some misrepresentations respecting it have been circulated, and the evil practices, against which it is aimed, are extending their baneful influence, some of his friends have advised him to make it public.— And for the first reason, he considers it necessary to omit any alteration, even where it might have been made for the better.

THE force of the arguments, offered against the fashionable amusements of the world, evidently rests upon the supposition, that we are accountable beings, and that religion is absolutely necessary for our present and future well-being.

BELIEVING, that the scriptures are the only rule of our faith and practice, the Author has drawn his arguments chiefly from them ; and to them he appeals. But he is sensible, that such arguments will have little weight with those, who slight the scriptures, or treat them with contempt. Such must be convinced by different means. And such means God will furnish, when he undertakes to deal with his enemies.

If the Bible be rejected, or if all are to be happy, let their characters be what they may, it certainly would be difficult to show, why every one might not eat, drink, and be merry ; or why all might not run into every excess of riot, and do what was right in their own eyes. For, in either of those cases, all restraint must be taken from the lusts and passions of men ; and every one have liberty to enter the temple of vice, and riot at pleasure. Hence, those, who take this ground, act consistently with their sentiments, when they indulge in fashionable amusements, and fashionable vices. And there is but little hope, that such will condescend even to read what condemns their favourite pursuits.

BUT it is hoped, that many, who indulge in thoughtless diversions, are not willing to give up their Bibles, to treat the religion of the gospel with contempt, or to slight a coming judgment. Such are ardently requested to pause, to read, and conscientiously

scientiously attend to the subject. And, if the evidence adduced against their diversions be scriptural, they will be inexcusable, if they reject it, or are not influenced by it. For they will reject what they allow to be sanctioned by the highest authority.

To condemn what is highly esteemed by the polite world is not the way to court popularity. But those, who are really polite, will at least be candid. If any are otherwise minded the author can bear their reflections, without being deeply wounded.—He wishes to approve himself unto God ; and having his approbation can dispense with the friendship of those, who hate the light of truth, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reprov'd,

A SERMON.

EZEKIEL XXXIII. 1—9.

Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman : If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people ; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning ; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning, his blood shall be upon him : but he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned ; if the sword come and take any from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity : but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. So thou, O Son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel : therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die ; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity : but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it : if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul.

THE import of these words is so plain, and their application so easy, that little need be said to illustrate them. But, in order to enforce them upon the mind, and impress them upon the memory, a few observations will be made.

1st. THE duty of religious Teachers, or Pastors, is like that of watchmen, who are set upon the walls of a city to watch, and give timely warning of the approaching enemy.

THUS Ezekiel was set to be a watchman unto the house of Israel, and was expressly required to give them warning. And, from the nature and design of the ministerial office, it is evident, that this must be the case with all gospel ministers. Accordingly, they are called *overseers* of the church, *watchmen* upon the walls of Zion. And they are expressly required, *to watch and be sober ; to take heed to their ministry ; to be instant in season and out of season ; to act the part of good soldiers ; to warn the unruly ; to rebuke those who sin before all ; and to instruct those, who oppose themselves.* Hence it is evident, that every Christian Minister is a watchman by office, and that it is his indispensable duty to watch and give warning to his people ; whether they hear or forbear. And no one can act the part of a good watchman, who does not carefully attend to this duty.

2d. THE office of the gospel ministry is derived from the highest authority, from the King of Kings.

It was Jehovah himself, that said unto the Prophet ; “ I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel.” And, when Christ ascended upon high to his kingly throne, *he gave some apostles ; and some prophets ; and some evangelists ; and some pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry.* It was He, who has all power in heaven and on earth, that commissioned his ministers, and sent them forth to preach

preach his gospel to every creature. Hence they are called his ambassadors, the ministers of the Lord of Hosts. And they must give an account of their embassy to him.

THE faithful minister must, then, endeavour to approve himself unto God, and will watch as one, that expects to give an account to his Lord. And those, who will not receive his message, but slight and despise him, must also answer for their conduct, and will be condemned for slighting the King, whose messenger he is. For thus saith the Lord unto his ministers ; “ He that heareth you heareth me ; and he that despiseth you despiseth me ; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.”*

3d. THE institution of the gospel ministry, or the appointing of spiritual watchmen, implies a declaration of danger.

IF a city is perfectly secure from all danger, it is needless to keep a watch. But if danger is apprehended from an invading enemy, or some internal cause, then a watch becomes necessary. And when the Prince expressly appoints a number of men to watch upon the walls, and give the alarm, it is a decisive evidence, that he considers the city as being in great danger.

God,

* It would be well, if those, who treat the gospel ministry with so much contempt in the present day, would seriously attend to these words of our Lord. For it is evident, that they really despise Christ and his Father, while they shoot out their bitter words against his ministers. And it is a pity, that any, who have any regard for Christianity, should countenance such open infidelity.

GOD, who is infinite in wisdom and perfectly acquainted with the state of fallen man, has, expressly appointed an order of men to stand upon the walls of Zion, to watch, and give the alarm to all of the approaching danger. But God would never do this, if there was not great need of it—if there was not danger. Hence, by appointing spiritual watchmen he clearly intimates, that there is great danger, and that the utmost care and watchfulness are necessary to avoid it.

4th. THE danger, against which gospel ministers are to watch, is of a moral or spiritual nature.

WE have just observed, that the institution of the gospel ministry implies, that there is danger. And there being spiritual watchmen equally implies, that the danger is of a spiritual nature. Accordingly they are said *to watch for souls*, and are required *to be sober, and vigilant, because the adversary, the devil, is continually going about, seeking whom he may devour*.

IT is often the case, that when a city is besieged without, many within take sides with the enemy, and wish to deliver their fellow-citizens into the hand of their mortal enemies. And it is frequently more difficult guarding against their secret intrigues, than against the open attacks of the enemy from without.

SATAN is the grand adversary of men, and is continually, by all his art and power, endeavouring to accomplish our destruction. But he is not the only enemy, who is seeking our ruin. There are multitudes of evil spirits combined with him. All hell is on his side. And he has millions to serve, and assist him,

him, in our world. He makes use of all the children of disobedience to ruin and destroy each other. And they are foolish enough to be the devil's slaves, to support his cause, and hasten each other's destruction. For they readily listen to his temptation, hearken to his counsel, and follow his directions. And he makes use of them to propagate error, to establish and countenance vicious practices, to corrupt the minds of others, and to draw them from the paths of virtue into the broad way of sin. But still all his attempts to destroy, were it not for the enemy in our own bosom, would be in vain. Were the inhabitants within united to defend the city, the enemy could not take it, either by violence or craft. But the human heart is wholly on the side of Satan. And all its lusts, passions, and corruptions are devoted to his service. These refuse to hearken to the voice of conscience, to submit to the authority and direction of reason; excite mutiny within, throw open the gates, and invite the enemy to enter. And while they can maintain their influence, there is no resisting his attacks. For he can always allure them by his temptations, and draw them effectually into his service *by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life*. Hence they must be resisted, and destroyed, or they will betray the city into the hand of Satan. But it is no easy task to subdue such desperate rebels; especially where they have long held their usurped dominion. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, who are *accustomed* to do evil." Hence the danger is very great. Our all is at stake. The enemy are numerous, subtil, and powerful; can attack us on our weakest side; and are sure to be seconded

seconded by a violent party within. Is it not then important, that the watchmen should be vigilant, should watch the enemy, and point out the danger? And must it not be conceded, that their duty calls them to attend to the various artifices of Satan, to point out the moral danger of men, and to oppose spiritual wickedness in high places?

5th. THE gospel minister, who carefully watches and faithfully warns his people, acts the part of a good watchman, & will at least deliver his own soul.

It is self evident, that the sentinel, who is set to watch the motions of an enemy, ought to be at his post, to keep a diligent watch, and to give immediate notice of the approaching danger. All must admit, that the watchman, who keeps a constant eye upon the enemy, attends to all his movements, and sounds a seasonable alarm, acts like a real friend to his country, and faithfully performs the important trust confided to him. And it must be acknowledged, that he deserves no blame, whatever may be the consequences. For he faithfully executed the part assigned him by his prince.

AND it is no less evident, that the gospel minister, who keeps a faithful watch, and gives seasonable warning, manifests a real regard for the good of his people, and executes with fidelity the important trust which has been confided to him. For he is a watchman by office, has been set apart for this very business, and is required to watch as one, that must give an account. Hence he acts like a good watchman in attending to the spiritual concerns of his people, in pointing out to them their enemy, and in warning
them

them of their danger. This is the proper business of his office. This he is in duty bound to do. And while he does this, every one who regards their best good, will approve of his conduct. For their safety, their best good, requires, that he should sound the alarm, and give them warning. And every one, who feels a real regard for them, will wish to have their danger set before them, to have their attention excited, their fears alarmed, and their minds strongly impressed with a sense of their real situation ; that they may escape to the strong hold, before all retreat is cut off, and destruction overwhelms them.

LET the spiritual watchman, then, act in character, and all, who love the souls of men, will approve of his conduct. And in doing this he will deliver his own soul. Whatever the consequence may be to others, he must be cleared. No blame can attach to him. He gave them seasonable warning. This was all that he could do. Hence, if they perish, their blood will not be required at his hand. For God says to the watchman ; “ If thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it ; and he does not, thou hast delivered thy soul.” And we are assured, that such will be a sweet savor unto God, both in them that are saved and in them that perish. Hence there are important reasons, why a minister should warn his people of their danger, even when there is little hope of doing them any real good.

6th. THE minister, who neglects to warn his people of their danger, to set the evil of their ways before them, acts a most unfaithful part, and must answer for the blood of souls.

THE

THE duty of a watchman is highly important, especially in times of danger. For the preservation of the city, and the safety of thousands depends upon his fidelity. Hence he ought to be highly responsible. And if he betrays his trust, or neglects his duty, and the city is taken, or any are destroyed, in consequence of his neglect, he ought to answer for the consequences. It is just, that their blood should be required at his hand ; and that he should be punished with severity for such criminal inattention.—What, then, must be the criminality, the punishment of the unfaithful minister ? He is set to watch, not for the safety of cities, or the preservation of empires ; but for the salvation of immortal souls. He is told, that their danger is great, is *required* to be *vigilant*, and *commanded* to *warn* them of their danger. Now if he betrays his trust, neglects to give them warning, does he not act the part of a traitor ? Is he not accountable for the fatal consequences of his unfaithfulness ? Will not the blood of souls be required of him ? Certainly this is what justice requires. And this is what the most High declares shall be done. For he says to the spiritual watchman ; “ When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die, if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity ; but his blood will I require at thine hand.”

AWFUL is the responsibility of the gospel minister. And dreadful must be his condemnation, if he is unfaithful. For he must answer for the souls of those who perish through his means. This consideration ought to make a deep impression upon the heart of every one, who is invested with the sacred office.—

And

And they ought all to *watch*, as those that must give an account. But if any, through fear of giving offence, neglect their duty, they will expose both themselves and their people to inevitable ruin; and must suffer the awful consequences.

7th. THOSE, who hearken to the watchman's voice, and take warning shall deliver their souls.

THIS is not always the case, when we are exposed to temporal danger. The watchman may discover the enemy, sound the alarm, and give the people warning: and they may take the alarm, prepare to defend themselves, or flee for safety; and yet all their efforts be in vain. The enemy may overtake, vanquish, and destroy them. But the case is otherwise in the spiritual conflict. God has graciously promised, that those, who take warning, and turn from their wicked way, shall deliver their souls. If they will hear the warning voice of his servants, take the alarm, and flee to the Lord Jesus, their souls shall live. The mighty God of Jacob will protect them, and defend them from their enemies. Hence men have all the encouragement, which they can reasonably desire, to induce them to forsake their evil ways, and to return unto the Lord. They may do it with perfect safety, will find protection, escape the rage of the enemy, and deliver their own souls. Are not these weighty considerations, powerful motives, strong inducements? Must we not feel their influence? And shall we not, if we regard either our duty or our interest, take warning, forsake the way of sin, and return unto the Lord with our whole hearts, that we may deliver every man his own soul?

8th.

8th. THOSE, who will not hearken to the message, which is delivered unto them from God, and turn from their way, must die in their sins.

IF men are exposed to temporal danger, they will generally take the alarm, and listen to the watchman's voice. But it is not so, when they are exposed to spiritual danger. When this is the case, they shut their eyes, stop their ears, and refuse to hear. They love the ways of sin, and are unwilling to believe, that there is any danger in pursuing them.— And all the inclinations, lusts and corruptions of their hearts, strongly attach them to the enemy. Hence they refuse to take the alarm, to see their danger, to hearken to the voice of those, who point out to them the enemy, and endeavour to convince them of the madness of being lured to ruin by his devices. And their infatuation is often so great, that they become jealous of their watchmen, hate them for their faithfulness, and turn their weapons against them to destroy them. But when this is the case, we may be sure, that destruction is near; that Satan reigns in their hearts; that the city has been betrayed; and that all is going to ruin. For when a people distrust their friends, and confide in their enemies; when they disregard the warning voice of those, who point out to them their danger, and hearken to those, who are plotting their destruction; when they turn against their very watchmen and persecute them to gratify a malignant foe, we may be sure, that their ruin is inevitable. For such folly must destroy them. And they will have none to blame but themselves. They heard the alarm sounded, and would not take warning. Hence their blood must be upon their own heads;

heads; and the watchman will escape. For thus saith the Lord God; "If thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, and he will not hearken, he shall die in his iniquity, and his blood shall be upon his own head: but thou hast delivered thy soul.—Hence inevitable destruction will come upon those, who will not take warning to forsake their evil way. And thus it will be made evident in a striking manner, *that he who being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

9th. PEOPLE ought not to blame the ministers of the gospel for bearing testimony against their wicked practices, and warning them of their danger.

THIS is one important end, for which they are placed upon the walls of Zion. This God *requires* of them. This they must do, or lose their own souls, and be accessory to the eternal ruin of their hearers. Hence, it is most unreasonable and unjust for people to blame and fault them for acting in character, for doing the duties of their office. What should we say of a people, who blamed their watchman for sounding an alarm upon the approach of an enemy? Do we not all see the wickedness and condemn the conduct of the ancient Jews for persecuting those, who spake unto them in the name of the Lord? But certainly those, who blame the faithful minister of Christ, act as inconsistently, as ever the rebellious Jews did. For they blame their spiritual guides for their fidelity, for obeying their God, and endeavoring to deliver them from the snare of the fowler.—Let such, then, candidly reflect upon the unreasonableness

bleness and impiety of their conduct; and learn to lay the blame where it ought to lie, at *their own* door. For if it were not for their own wickedness, their ministers would not be called to the painful task of reproofing them.

THE observations, which have been made, are clearly implied in our text, and are intended to show that gospel ministers are set to watch against our spiritual enemies, that they must be faithful, and that people ought to hearken to their warning voice, to receive their reproofs with thankfulness, and to profit by their instructions.

Now, if these observations are just, you may easily see, my friends, what your minister ought to do, when he sees you in danger, and how you ought to feel and conduct, when reproofed. You must be sensible, that it is a painful task to reprove; but you see, that it is a necessary duty. And you ought to consider, that the wounds of a friend are faithful, and much more for your interest, than the flatteries of an enemy. May I not, then, hope, that you will hear me with candour, while I attempt to point out the evil of some pursuits, which engage your attention, and that you will hearken to the warning voice of your watchman? Let not Satan prejudice your minds; he is your enemy. Let not your inclinations and passions cloud your judgment, and keep the truth from entering into your minds; for they are confederate with the enemy. And, if the enemy can maintain his influence in your minds, it is easy to foresee what the consequence will be. Do, then, act like wise men, hear, and conduct, as those that must give an account to God.

I SHOULD be sorry, that what I am about to say should give offence to any one ; but I must be allowed to use plainness of speech, to fear God rather than man. And, if any will not hear, if any are displeased, they *must suffer* the consequences ; I shall be clear of their blood.

It is well known, that an unusual attention has of late been paid to what are called fashionable amusements in this place. I say unusual attention, because I have been led to think with pleasure, that the youth here were not much given to such amusements. But I have learnt, with much sorrow, that the enemy has taken advantage of them, and is alluring them by such vanities on to destruction. I therefore feel it to be my indispensable duty to lift up my warning voice, and to point out their danger, whether they will hear, or whether they forbear ; but I wish to convince and to save. I shall, therefore, endeavour briefly to state some of the objections, which lie against such practices, and to show you the danger of pursuing them.

THE observations, which I am about to make, will generally apply to all the fashionable amusements of the day, such as card-playing, dancing, balls, assemblies, and theatrical exhibitions ; but some of them may not be so general in their application. I have a particular reference, however, to dancing-schools, balls, and assemblies, with their concomitants. These it is said, are fashionable, are lawful, are innocent, and conducive to social intercourse. That they are fashionable among the thoughtless, the gay, and the dissipated will be admitted ; but we shall deny, that

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ever they were fashionable among the sober, the virtuous, and the good. Their lawfulness certainly may be questioned, while every thing of the kind is forbidden in the act * regulating inns, and public-houses, and a heavy fine imposed upon every one that countenances, or attends them. That they are innocent has never been proved, & can by *no means* be admitted. And, if they do promote social intercourse, this is nothing in their favour, unless the intercourse is of the right kind. For to promote that, which is evil, can never be right. And it may with equal truth be said, that revelling, drunkenness, gambling, and almost all kinds of wickedness, tend to promote a kind of social intercourse. But is this a reason, why they should be practised? Certainly, the argument is as good in one case, as in the other. Must we not then, if we let reason decide, and are not influenced by improper feelings, acknowledge, that there is but little which can be said in favour of such amusements? Indeed, I know of nothing, which can be said to justify them; but there is much to be said against them.

THEY are certainly vain and unsatisfying. They do not enlighten the understanding, mend the heart, regulate the passions, or purify the affections. They neither fit us to live, or prepare us to die. And they afford no *real* peace, lasting comfort, or substantial happiness to the soul. So that they can be of no real service to us, either for time or for eternity.

Hence

* It is a great evil, that such a good law should be only a dead letter. And it would be highly gratifying, if *magistrates* and people paid a *particular* regard to it.

Hence they must be vain and trifling in their nature. And no one will pretend, that they are not pursued in a vain and trifling manner. But God condemns those, who draw iniquity with cords of *vanity* ; utter *vain* things ; become *vain* in their imaginations ; and follow after *vanity*. Hence, such amusements cannot be innocent, or worthy of the attention of rational beings. Accordingly the virtuous, the wise and the good have always condemned them. A worthy writer* of the last Century, and a minister of Boston says ; “ Some of the more sober Papists have not stuck to say : *The dancer breaks the covenant of God, made in baptism ; he promised to renounce the devil and his pomps ; but when he enters into a dance, he goes in the pompous procession of the devil.*—In the primitive times, more than one or two of the fathers thundered against them as a *diabolical practice* ; and whole Synods did prohibit the usage of them, even at *weddings*, as well as at other seasons. Our reformed Synods of later days in France, Holland, & Poland, forbore to brandish the sword of *church discipline*, and provide *censures* for any dancers that might be found among their communicants. AUSTIN says, *The miserable dancer knows not, that as many paces as he makes in dancing, so many steps he makes to hell.* And the blessed old WALDENSES testified, *In a dance one breaks all the ten commands of God.* The most eminent reformers concurred in witnessing against these dances, as an unlawful recreation : and among the English divines and bishops, they have been *decried* by a cloud
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* DR. COTTON MATHER in his ornaments of the daughters of Zion. p. 14, 15—A book worthy the attention of every female.

of witnesses. Even the ancient Romans, though heathens, considered skill in dancing as an infamous thing. SCIPIO called a dancer, *impudent*: TULLY could say, a *dancer is doubtless either drunk or mad*; and argued against some, that they must needs be vicious, inasmuch as they were *dancers*; nor did SENECA think it any other than a matter of bitter complaint, *That there were dancing-schools tolerated in the city*: and PLUTARCH says, a virtuous woman must not be a dancer." And Miss MORE observes: that SALLUST* notes it as a defect in an accomplished female; "*That she was too good a singer and dancer for a virtuous woman.*" Such have been the sentiments of the best and wisest men, both in the Christian and Heathen world. And those, who are most eminent for piety, for love to God and men, in the Christian world, are still of the same sentiment. I am sensible, that some professors of religion, and even some moral preachers, (I will not call them gospel ministers,) countenance such diversions; but such will be condemned by the sober heathen in the day of judgment. Such are not led by the spirit of God; but are children of the wicked one. They may, indeed, have a name to live; but they are really dead. They may deceive themselves and others by retaining a form of godliness; but while they deny the power thereof, and take pleasure in sin, they give unequivocal evidence, that they have never heard and learned of the Father, and have no part in Christ. Hence, the countenance of such can afford no evidence in favour of such vain diversions.

For

* Will not such Heathens rise up in the judgment, and condemn the men and women of the present generation?

For we know, that the wicked will do wickedly.— But the multitude of godly witnesses, who have borne testimony against such practices, afford strong evidence of their criminality. For we cannot suppose, that all the most eminent saints of God could have been deceived respecting the nature and moral tendency of such things ; and that even the sober heathen would have agreed with them. Consequently, we must be perversely obstinate, if we do not regard their united testimony.

BUT we rest not the cause here ; we appeal to a higher testimony, and say, that such diversions are contrary to the express commands of God, and in every point of view wholly wrong. God requires us to be *sober* ; to *watch* ; and to *pray* ; to *shun the very appearance of evil* ; to *walk circumspectly*, as children of the *light* and of the *day* ; to *yield* our members, as instruments of *righteousness* unto him ; to *glorify him* in our *bodies and spirits*, which are his ; to *watch* at the gates of wisdom, and *wait* at the posts of her door ; to *deny ourselves* ; to *mortify* our lusts and corruptions ; to *crucify* the old man with his lusts and affections ; to become dead to sin, and *alive* to God ; to be *renewed* in the temper of our minds, *conformed* to him, but not to the world ; and to be *holy*, even as he is *holy*. Now it is self-evident, that attending to vain diversions is inconsistent with each of these commands. And no one will pretend, that they go to such diversions with a view to *solemnize* their minds ; to *excite* in themselves a *watchful* and *prayerful* temper of mind ; to *shun the appearance of evil* ; to *yield* their members as instruments of *righteousness* unto God ; to *mortify* their
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lusts and corruptions ; to *crucify* the old man ; to *wean* themselves from the world ; and to *acquire true holiness of heart*. Hence, such diversions are contrary to all these commands of God, and a direct violation of them.

THEY are also inconsistent with the duty, which parents owe to their children. God requires them to bring up their children for him ; to teach them his laws, statutes, and ordinances ; to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But no one can suppose, that sending children to balls, assemblies, and such amusements, is the way to comply with these commands, or compatible with them. For it is *too evident*, that there is nothing there, which tends to lead them to God, or fit them for his service. Hence, those diversions are inconsistent with the duty, which parents owe to their children. And parents cannot consent to their attending them, without transgressing these commands, and violating the trust, which has been reposed in them.

CAN any one believe, that these diversions are consistent with a proper attention to family or secret prayer ? These are moral duties, enforced by divine authority. And no one can live in the neglect of them, without manifest guilt and danger. But how can they be attended, when the parents and their children are at the assembly ? Will their minds and hearts be prepared to join in prayer, or to retire to their closets, after they leave such places of vain mirth ? If not, and if such scenes have a direct tendency to destroy a spirit of prayer, then, certainly they cannot be innocent, or safe ; but are highly sinful, and extremely dangerous. Is

Is attending such diversions consistent with this petition in the Lord's prayer ; " Lead us not into temptation ? " Is it not directly contrary, going in the way of temptation, and exposing ourselves to the assaults of the enemy ?

CAN any one go from his knees to such mirthful scenes, or ask God to afford him his presence and blessing while attending them ? If not, they cannot be innocent or lawful diversions. For we ought and may, ask God to bless us in all our lawful pursuits. But I presume, those, who attend such diversions, do not wish to think of God. He is not in all their thoughts. At such times they have no reverential fear of him. And, if the thought obtrudes, that they *must give an account* to him, that he *notices* all their conduct, that their *ways* are *before his eyes* ; they must *banish* the thought, as soon as *possible*.

Do those, who attend such diversions answer the noble end of their existence ? We have been taught *that the chief end of man is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever*. Is this end attained by such amusements ? Is God glorified by them, or enjoyed in them ? If not, then it is inconsistent with the noble end of our existence to attend them.

ARE not those guilty of great ingratitude, who attend such diversions ? God has made them, has preserved their lives, given them health, and the common mercies of life ; but they forget him at such times, waste the bounties of his providence, or consume them upon their lusts, and yield their members instruments unto sin. Hence they must be
guilty

guilty of great ingratitude. “ *Will ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish and unwise ?*”

Is it not highly improper for those, who are *condemned*, and *exposed* to death, thus to sport themselves ? “ *God is angry with the wicked every day.*” “ *They are condemned already.*” “ *Their feet stand upon a slippery place, and in due time they shall slide.*” Is it not, then, highly improper for them to spend their time in mirth ? Surely the *end* of such mirth will be *heavinefs*. And those, who *rejoice* in such a way *must mourn and weep* at the last.

CAN we suppose, that Christ, or his apostles, ever attended such diversions ? If not, then those, who do attend them, do not follow their example ; or comply with the injunction *to walk as he walked*.

It will not be said, that attending a ball, is the way to lay up treasures in heaven. But certainly we need to have treasures laid up there. And God requires us to lay up our treasures in heaven, that our hearts may be there also. Hence attending such diversions must, in this respect, be inconsistent with our interest and our duty.

THOSE, who attend such diversions, set a *bad example* before others. If one has his diversions, another will want his. Thus the door will be opened for all to run to an *excess* of riot. And who can tell, where such excess and riot will end ?* *Lust, when*
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* Sinful habits are formed by imperceptible degrees. One wrong step naturally prepares the way for another. And thus
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it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin ; and sin, when it is finished bringeth forth death."

*"The friendship of the world is enmity with God."**
But one principal end of these vain amusements is to obtain and secure the friendship of the world. Hence they must in their nature be *enmity* with God. And if any one love them, the love of the Father is not in him.† For it is not possible to love God, and yet keep the friendship of the world, which always hates him.‡

SUCH diversions are suited to please the flesh, to gratify the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life. And those, who do live in them, do live after the flesh. But the apostle says ; " If ye live after the flesh, *ye shall die.*"|| The end of such things must, then, be death.

LIFE is the *time* of God's forbearance, and the *only* day of grace. Hence we *must* attend to the duties of religion *in life*, or lose all its pleasures forever.

the unsuspecting youth gradually sink to ruin. It is a fact, that fashionable amusements are nearly connected with fashionable vices ; that many dissipated characters attend them ; and that many unsuspecting females and thoughtless youth have been led by them into every kind of dissipation. Hence those, who venture there, do it at their peril. They may escape, and so they might, if they took a draught of poison ; but they have much reason to fear the contrary. And it is astonishing how parents, if they have any knowledge of the human heart, and regard for their children, can consent to their going in the way of such temptation.

* James 4. 4. † 1 John 2. 15. ‡ John 7. 7. & 15. 18.

|| Romans 8. 13.

ever. But life is *short*, is *uncertain*. It must then be folly in the extreme to waste it in the ball-room, or at the assembly. For the duties of religion have no admittance there. And should she enter with her heavenly train, all such vain amusements would be exchanged for more sublime and rational employments.*

THE gospel minister is required to *exhort young men to be sober minded*. Will attending such diversions dispose them to hearken to such exhortation, or to reject it? Have they not a natural tendency to prejudice the mind against the ministers of Christ, and to harden the heart against all their exhortations? And do they not generally produce these effects?

God requires aged women to be in behaviour, as becometh holiness; and to teach the young women to be *sober*, to love their husbands, to be chaste, to *keep at home*, and be good.† Do mothers faithfully discharge this duty, when they allow their daughters to go to places of public diversions, and join in scenes of dissipation? I must be allowed to say, that experience has not justified their conduct; and that it is absurd to suppose, that such diversions ever will make their daughters either sober or chaste, or dispose them to love either their husbands or their homes.‡

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* In the late revivals of religion several instances have occurred, where the ball-room was converted into a place of prayer.

† Titus 2. 3. 4.

‡ Miss MORE says: "The feelings of kindness diminish in proportion as the expression of it becomes more diffuse and indiscriminate."

THE Spirit of God was purchased and is given by Christ to lead us into the truth, and seal us unto the day of redemption. And we are warned of the infinite danger of grieving him away. But attending vain amusements does *grieve* the Spirit of God, *destroy* all serious conviction, and *harden* the soul in sin. Hence there is great danger in attending them. For if God's holy Spirit forsakes us, our ruin will be inevitable.

ALL wish to be happy ; but the pleasures of sin are incompatible with true happiness.* This can be found only in wisdom's ways. The soul must return to God, before it can find rest and peace. But vain diversions do not lead it back to him, but further and further from him. Hence they are incompatible with the true happiness of an immortal being ; and will disappoint those, who pursue them in the end. For they separate between God and the soul, unfit us for Heaven, deprive us of all the pleasures of religion now, and will eventually end in the most exquisite misery. INDEED

criminate. The very traces of *simplicity and godly sincerity*, in a delicate female, wear away imperceptibly by constant collision with the world at large. And perhaps no woman takes so little interest in the happiness of her real friends, as she whose affections are incessantly evaporating in universal civilities ; as she who is saying fond and flattering things at random to a circle of five hundred people every night." *Strictures on female education* p 221, Happy would it be, if this excellent book was in every family, and attended to by every female.

* Miss MORE says : " I appeal to the bosoms of these incessant hunters in the chace of pleasure, whether they are really happy. No :—in the full tide and torrent of diversions, in the full blaze of gaiety and splendor, The heart, distrusting, asks if this be joy ?" *idem* p 240.

INDEED such diversions are contrary to the dictates of reason and of conscience ; to every requirement of God's law and every precept of the gospel. They grieve the children of God, and are painful to the ministers of Christ. They gratify the corrupt propensities of the human heart, lead to *extravagance* in dress, and *nourish* both *envy* and *pride*. They stupify the conscience, harden the heart, & strengthen evil habits. They grieve the Spirit of God, destroy all serious conviction, unfit the mind for prayer and every religious duty, and are contrary to the whole tendency of the gospel ; are inconsistent with every christian grace. They are calculated to draw away the heart from God, to counteract the effect of gospel preaching, and to make the bands of death strong upon the soul. So far as they prevail, they destroy religion, and injure good morals. They murder time, injure the health, and expose the lives of their votaries.*

THEY are inconsistent with the employments of heaven, unfit the soul for death, and will sooner or later occasion bitter sorrow. They *please* Satan ; but *displease* God, and are dishonorable to him.† And they render the death of Christ of none effect
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* Diseases are often contracted by attending such amusements. And God has smitten some, while actually pursuing them. Can charity suppose, that such were prepared to meet their God.

† It is said, that the strictest regulations are observed at fashionable assemblies. And so they are at fashionable *duels*. But is not this establishing iniquity by a law ? Is there any thing done, in the best regulated assembly, that is displeasing to Satan, or that is pleasing to God, and calculated to promote his glory ? A candid answer, I am persuaded, would settle the whole inquiry.

to all, who pursue them. Hence they must be totally wrong, and exceedingly sinful.* Consequently all *ought* to discountenance them. And those, who have gone after them, ought to do so no more.

My friends, your watchman has discovered to you the enemy, and pointed out to you your danger. And he has endeavored to promote your best interest, to save you from ruin. Now it lies with you to determine, whether you will hear him or not, whether you will return unto the Lord, or still continue in the service of Satan. Do then weigh the subject candidly, attend to it carefully, pray with humility for instruction, and act, as you will have reason to wish you had done, when we meet at the judgment-seat of Christ. For we must meet before him, and answer for our respective conduct. Now I am persuaded, that you will all justify me in the view of death and of the coming judgment, Whenever you seriously think ; *well I must die, and stand at the bar of God*, you will say, *our minister is right in warning us, and we must perish, if we do not attend to his admonition.* Why then will you not yield to such conviction, and act a more rational part ?

SHOULD I be continued with you a few years, it is likely, that I shall be called to visit many of you upon your dying beds ; what will you say about these

* I am sensible that after all that has been said, many will still say, that such diversions are innocent amusements. It is needless to argue with such. The fact is, they love their pleasures, and they are *resolved* to pursue them, and never seriously inquire whether they are sinful or not. Nor do they care, if they can only keep themselves in countenance by calling them innocent.

these diversions then ? Must you not, while you hover upon the brink of eternity, and look into the grave, pronounce them vanity, and condemn yourselves for having spent your time, and lost your souls in pursuing them ? I wish to save you from such bitter reflections in the dying-hour. Shall I have the pleasure of doing it or not ? Will you forsake these sinful pleasures, which must sooner or later give you pain, and try the pleasures of religion. It is not possible for you to enjoy them both. “ *No man can serve two masters.* ” Sit down, then, and count the cost ; weigh the subject candidly, and make a wise choice. If these *momentary* pleasures are better, than those which are *eternal*, then pursue them. If the pleasures of sin with their consequences are more desirable, than the pleasures of religion and the rewards of virtue, then take them for your portion, and prepare for the consequences. But let not Satan, let not the evil propensities of your hearts lead you to act contrary to the dictates of your reason, and the voice of conscience.

My friends I have much more to say on God's behalf against your sinful vain pursuits, but must forbear. The subject is now before you, and must be left to your decision. “ *If you are wise, you will be wise for yourselves ; but if you slight reproof, you alone must bear it.* ” Your danger has been set before you ; if you take warning and turn from your evil way, all will be well ; but if you will not do it, you must die in your sins, and descend the broad road to destruction. *But O that you would be wise ! that you would consider, that God for all these things will bring you into judgment !*

MAY the God of mercy open your eyes, turn your feet into the ways of his testimony, and guide you in the path of life.

AMEN.